

# Analysis of American Ethnic Female Subjectivity: Based On the Female Voice in the *Bluest Eye* and the *Joy Luck Club*

Zhang Li<sup>1\*</sup>, Wang Ce<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>English Department, North China Electric Power University, Baoding, Hebei, People's Republic of China

<sup>2</sup>English Department, North China Electric Power University, Baoding, Hebei, People's Republic of China

DOI: [10.21276/sjhss.2019.4.7.5](https://doi.org/10.21276/sjhss.2019.4.7.5)

| Received: 28.06.2019 | Accepted: 10.07.2019 | Published: 29.07.2019

\*Corresponding author: Zhang Li

## Abstract

With the development of feminism, the works of American ethnic female writers' works has received a lot of attention. Discovering and interpreting the subjectivity in these works are of great importance to female readers. Here, the author made an effort in exploring the subjectivity contained in female writers' works. The exploration is based on the women's voice in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Joy Luck Club*. The author explained how the works represented the rising of female consciousness and how the figures are portrayed in this paper, trying to get a better understanding of subjectivity, the author relates her findings with gender issues.

**Keywords:** American ethnic female, subjectivity, women's voice, female consciousness.

**Copyright @ 2019:** This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution license which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use (NonCommercial, or CC-BY-NC) provided the original author and source are credited.

## INTRODUCTION

American ethnic female literature has flourished after the Feminist Movement. The origin of feminism could be traced back to France in 1837. Charles Fourier, one of the French philosophers, is the one who created this term. By the end of 1910, feminism has made its own debut in Europe and America. In 1968, as the rereading of *The Second Sex* by people became more extensive, feminism movement was then in the full bloom. This book was written in 1949 by a defender of women's rights, De Beauvoir. She calls upon the equal rights of women in her work. She argues that it is not fair that people distinguish women from men. Women should be treated equally as men [1].

Some of the American ethnic female writers, which have been encouraged by the social status of that time also took part in this movement in the form of creating literary works about this topic. These books were so popular at that time that the writers were considered to be the major forces who were supporting this movement. The female writers' thoughts have been entailed in the language of the female characters in their works. Analyzing the female characters' languages would be helpful in understanding the rising of female consciousness. As long as a woman realized her female identity, she will inevitably establish her own subjectivity. Subjectivity is an indispensable factor in constituting a full female identity. Subjectivity is not

something that born with, so that some of the characters of women share the experience of establishing their subjectivity. By reading their work, the literature could inspire others.

The study of ethnic women's literature cannot be separated from the unique social identity of the writers. They are female ethnic minorities. They suffered more oppression and exploitation than white women, thus formed a unique kind of female consciousness. African American female writers and Chinese American female writers are two major groups in the community of American ethnic female writers. The researches in this field have drawn a lot of attention at home and abroad.

### Introduction of Toni Morrison and *The Bluest Eye* and *The Joy Luck Club*

Toni Morrison was one of the distinguished American ethnic female writers which was born in Ohio. Morrison grew up with a love of literature. *The Bluest Eye* was composed in her early years, which was published in 1970. *The Bluest Eye* could be considered as an autobiographical work which recorded part of Toni Morrison's childhood experience. This story was set in Toni Morrison's hometown, Ohio. The narrator of this book is a black little girl. Both Morrison's family and MacTeer's family were suffered in the Great Depression. At the end of this book, Toni Morrison

admitted that this story was inspired by a small conversion with another little girl, who longed for a pair of blue eyes.

Claudia and Frieda lived in Lorain with their family. Although their family was also influenced by the Great Depression, their family was also filled with care and love. On the contrary, Pecola suffered a lot in her family. Pecola's parents often fight with each other. Pecola thought it was her to be blamed of her parent's fight. If she had blue eyes, she would be loved by her parents. She also believes that being white or less black is beautiful.

Pecola's parents suffered a lot in their own lives. Her mother was often beaten by her father. The only place she could find her own value is a white woman house where she helped cleaning. Pecola's father was left to his aunt by his parents. He was humiliated by two white boys while trying having sex for the first time. He then fined his father, but his father refused to help him. He then married with Pecola's mother with no love. Pecola was raped twice by her own father. Poor Pecola blame herself for all these sufferings. She went to a clergyman for help, but he used her to kill a dog which he disliked. Pecola went mad eventually, she believed that she already had that blue eyes as she wished.

Pecola was completely destroyed by the life she lived. She was never loved by her parents. The only two wishes in Pecola's life are having a pair of blue eyes and being loved by her family. Neither of her wish is fulfilled. In this way, Pecola was forced into her own fantasy world. She strongly believed through a pair of blue eyes she could see a totally different world. In the end, Pecola was driven to crazy. This is even worse than death, because she is not allowed any release from her world.

Amy Tan is a Chinese American writer. She was born in America. After she grow up, she learned from her mother that her mother has been married to a Chinese man when she was in China. In this way, this story also rerecords her life in America. After Amy Tan's first work *The Joy Luck Club* was published.

*The Joy Luck Club* concentrated on exploring the tender and tenacious relationship between the mothers and daughters. There are altogether four mother-daughter pairs in this novel. They are Suyuan Woo and June Woo, Lindo Jong and Waverly Jong, An-mei Hsu and Rose Hsu Jordan, Ying-ying St. Clair and Lena St. Clair. The daughters are all the second generation of the immigrants.

Suyuan Woo and June Woo: Suyuan Woo was Jing-mei's mother and the founder of the Joy Luck Club. She was forced to leave her twin daughter on the road. Her life was saved by others eventually. In America, she married again. At last, June came back to China to find her half-sisters in Shanghai. Suyuan is a

strong-willed woman. She struggled in all her life to find happiness. Her strong will also cause the problem between she and June. June misunderstand her mother that she didn't love her because she did not make her mother proud of her. In fact, her mother loved her daughter in a deep way. Part of their mother-daughter problem was stem from culture misunderstanding.

Lindo Jong and Waverly Jong: Lindo Jong learns from an early age about the powers of invisible strength. This is a kind of ability of hiding one's thoughts even if the one was in a disadvantage situation. She was once married in China. But it was a loveless marriage. She was also tortured by her mother-in-law in physically and mentally. Due to superstitious reasons, she managed to run away from that miserable marriage. Waverly is Lindo's daughter. Waverly was good at chess when she was young. But she did not like Lindo claim the ownership of her success. So she became rebellious in her family, disobey her mother's will. Until she grow up, did they talk about the things that hinder in their mind.

An-mei Hsu and Rose Hsu Jordan: An-mei's mother has a great influence on this mother-daughter pair. An-mei's mother was a strong woman after her husband died. Unfortunately, she was cheated by her friends. She was then raped by another man. This was unacceptable at that time. She was forced to leave from her family to be Wu Tsing's fourth wife. She committed suicide in order to give her daughter a strong soul. An-mei then tell this story to her daughter Rose when she was about to divorce her husband. Rose sacrificed all herself to her husband. In this way, she lost herself. After her mother told her her grandmother's story, she decided to live for herself.

Ying-ying and Lena: Ying-ying's first marriage was a disaster. Her husband cheated on her after their wedding. Ying-ying was once weak and helpless in that marriage, but later she decided to take revenge on her first husband by leaving him and killing their son. After she married again, she slowly develops to be passive. Ying-ying was born in the year of the Tiger. The Chinese believe that the person born in the year of tiger is tougher than people born in other zodiac years [2]. Not until did Ying-ying find that she has pass her passive and weak personality to her daughter, did she tell her daughter about her old story and helped her daughter get rid of her cold marriage. Lena finally divorced Harold and find her Mr. Right.

### **The Rising of Female Consciousness and the Realization of Subjectivity in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Joy Luck Club***

This part will take Cixous's feminine writing as the theoretical framework. The writer's voice is contained in the realization of discourse of literary works. What the female writer appeals for in her work could be regarded as her voice.[3] In this paper the

author will focus on her appealing for the rising of female consciousness.

Pecola, the protagonist of this novel, seldom speak. She fainted after Cholly raped her. She did not said too much. Even if she said to her mother, her mother didn't believe her. She did turned to be talkative after she went mad. but she expressed her chaotic inner world in her mad words. In this way people will not regard Pecola as a voiceless character [4]. The experience of Pecola was well designed by Morrison. One of her intentions is rise the female readers' female consciousness. Pecola is voiceless, but what she has expressed sounds much louder those who could speak. Her silence was braked while the formation of it.

This conclusion was drawn after the author compared the different influences which the two kinds of expressions produced. In this way, the author's assumption may sound to be more reasonable. We all know that Pecola suffered a lot, and usually those who suffered tend to share what his or her suffering to others. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison intentionally deprived Pecola's right to speak. And the readers will be curious about the mental condition of Pecola when they read this novel. In order to figure Pecola's emotional condition, the female reader will imagine herself as Pecola. By this process, the sorrow of Pecola's experience will affect the readers deeper than those characters who express their inner feeling with words.

Pecola did not acquire her subjectivity in this story. But after the female individuals finished reading this story, they might get a better understanding of their female identity. The attempt the female readers made to define their own condition in the society symbolizes the rising of their female consciousness. In this way, Morrison has achieved her intention. The female won't stop at the step of discovering their female identity; they will try to get rid of the fixed ideology that dominates the way they think. In this way, the stereotyped ideology will be break down. Then the female reders will assume their own subjectivity, a new way they view themselves and others.

In the following part, the author will focus on analyzing the stories of Rose Hsu Jordan, Ying-ying St. Clair, Lena St. Clair and Lindo Jong. The female conscious rising of those characters is significant in this novel. The role Rose assumed in the relationship with Ted shared similarity with the conjugal relationship of some Chinese couples. Rose was always willing to sacrifice for Ted. This kind of thought was typical consequence of the influence of sexism.

Sexism is a deep-rooted problem in almost every culture. In this novel, these four pairs of mother-daughter pairs were all deeply influenced by this noxious ideology. Rose's passivity with Ted is based on

the stereotypical gender roles of a proactive, heroic male and a submissive, victimized female. Sacrificing for the family without being asked for, which seems to be sweet, but she lost her own identity bit by bit. She was afraid of making choices, which indicates that she is afraid of taking responsibility. While taking responsibility helps build one's identity. She did not value herself in their relationship. Ted did not have to ask, she would have already prepared everything for him. Ted's ignorance of her sacrifice foreshadowed the breakdown of their marriage. Rose did sense that their relationship was in danger. In order to save her marriage, she decided to save her marriage with having a baby with Ted. She did not see that outburst of Ted's disappointment to this marriage was just delayed not solved.

There is no way for Rose notice her value in the marriage as long as she identifies herself with patriarchal ideology. The patriarchy, as an unjust social system, enforces gender roles. It is oppressive to both men and women [5]. After they married, Ted wanted Rose to make some decisions by her own, but Rose resisted. He became angry when she resisted, accusing her of shirking responsibility. Ted took everything Rose prepared for him for granted. This Imbalanced relationship will definitely conduct negative consequences. Soon afterward, Ted asked for a divorce. Rose was so helpless at that time. She seemed like to be Ted's puppet. There is nothing she could do but accept. When Ted told her that he want a divorce, she thought there is another women in their marriage. She believes that the reason why Ted wants divorce her is Ted didn't love her anymore. She cannot even see herself in this relationship. She stands with Ted, and doesn't notice that she should speak up for herself.

An-mei came to help her daughter notice her value. She guided Rose through the realization of her woman consciousness. Rose's love is as valuable as Ted's in their relationship. An-mei inspired Rose by the story of her mother. It was not too late. She then told Ted that she would not step back anymore. she then regard Ted as the husband in their relationship, not a commander. And Rose herself was no more the victim; she became the wife in the relationship. In this way, we could say Rose established her subjectivity.

Ying-ying St. Clair, is an sorrow figure in this novel. She once killed her baby in order to take revenge on her husband. This action of punishing her husband is brave. However, the author would not take the action of drawing her baby was out of bare hate. she was trying to fight for herself at the expense of her baby's life. But she did was wrong. Not all the process of the rising of female consciousness would be as wise and reasonable as Rose's. She was deeply hurt by ending the life of the innocent baby with her own hands. I would like to say Ying-ying is rebellious figure. When she noticed that

her daughter was influenced by her passivity. She decided to save her daughter and set out her sprite.

In Lena's childhood, she usually hear the sound of her neighbour fighting and yelling, but she realized that the shouting and weeping she hears through the wall is a kind of deep love between mother and daughter, she realizes the importance of expressing one's feelings, even at the cost of peace and harmony. She often allowed Harold to bully her spiritually and financially in order to maintain the peace in her family. Ying-ying said Lina did not have a soul may indicate that she did not have her own subjectivity. She always swallows all the bitterness and pretended to be happy. It is deserved to notice that Lena had placed the vase upon an unstable table; she knew the placement of the vase was in danger, but she did nothing to protect the vase from falling down from the table. Like the vase, Lena's marriage is in danger of falling and shattering. She used to be too timid to speak up for herself, but now with her woman consciousness rising from the bottom of her heart, she decided to ask Harold stop being so cold and fair to her. She needed to be loved as she loved Harold. Lina finally left Harold and found the one who respect and value her.

Lindo Jong helped herself get out of her predicament without waiting God's salvation. She was full of strategies when she tried to get out of the Huang's family. At that time in China, most girls did not understand what female subjectivity is. The girls were taught to accept what has been arranged for them. Once a girl got married, she would have to service her husband's family and bear child. Lindo was forced to live almost as a servant to her mother-in-law and husband, conforming to idealized roles of feminine submission and duty. The start point of the rising of Lindo's female conscious is when she decided to blow off the candle by the foot of their marriage bed. On the first day of Lindo's wedding night, the parents light a pair of red candles at each end of the wedding bed. If the candle extinguished, custom says the marriage will not be long. By blowing out the flame, Lindo takes control of her own fate, eventually extricating herself from an unhappy marriage.

## CONCLUSION

In general, American ethnic female subjectivity is represented in every way in the two works. The aim of this thesis is to analysis the American ethnic female's subjectivity within the works

of the female writers. After all the analysis, the author presented how did the female consciousness was risen.

It is worth to note that, the women in *The Joy Luck Club*, they all establish their own subjectivity, a new way to perceive the world. Since Pecola seems to be voiceless, the author analyzed the underlying female voice in this novel. Pecola's silence would sound much louder than those who can actually speak. Pecola did not experience female consciousness rising, so the author interpreted this work in line with the readers. Predicating the influence of this work on the readers is a key procedure in analyzing *The Bluest Eye*.

During the narration of this thesis, an interesting idea occurred to the author's mind: the rising of women's consciousness needs to be triggered by some kind of oppression. As the author analyzed above, it is indeed the case to the female figures in *The Joy Luck Club* [6]. If this is the case, does feminism calls for the oppression. The stories in the form of novel are all processed with artistic intentions by the author. I believed that I had a better understanding of my identity without suffering from such severe discrimination. Within this thesis, the author has taken African American female writers and Chinese American as example to analysis the establishment of female subjectivity. The American ethnic writers also have Japanese American and Mexican American, ect. These ethnic women's conditions are also need to be paid attention by the Chinese scholars

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. De Beauvoir, S. (1952). *The second sex* (HM Parshley, trans.). *New York: Vintage.*(Original work published 1949).
2. Willard, N. (1989). *Tiger Spirits.*
3. Sprenger, S. M. (1994). Baudelaire and the Aesthetics of Barbarism. *Romance Notes*, 35(1), 87-96.
4. Mahaffey, P. D. (2004). The Adolescent Complexities of Race, Gender, and Class in Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye". *Race, Gender & Class*, 155-165.
5. Musto, M. (2009). Marx in Paris: Manuscripts and notebooks of 1844. *Science & Society*, 73(3), 386-402.
6. Romagnolo, C. (2003). NARRATIVE BEGINNINGS IN AMY TAN'S "THE JOY LUCK CLUB": A FEMINIST STUDY. *Studies in the Novel*, 35(1), 89-107.